

107 Washington Avenue North/Runyon's

1895, 1909

The building that is now Runyon's at 107 Washington Avenue North was built in 1895. Designed in the Beaux Arts style, popular in the late Nineteenth Century, the building served as an annex for a vaudeville and burlesque theater in the first half century of its existence, later transitioning to a variety of uses before becoming known as Runyon's in 1983.

The history of 107 Washington Avenue begins with the history of the property next door on the corner of Washington Avenue North and First Avenue North: 101 Washington Avenue North. This property is now a surface parking lot. It was here that the Windsor Hotel was constructed in 1876



Minneapolis Daily Times

by Levi Cook. The Windsor Hotel had close to one hundred hotel rooms at its peak and was considered a first-class hotel in the city for its first two decades of existence. In 1895, 107 Washington Avenue North was constructed next to the Windsor Hotel. While there is little documentation of these early years, newspaper photographs from the late 1890s appear to show it as a one-story building.

In the early 1900s, the Windsor Hotel fell on hard times, and in 1909, both the Windsor and 107 Washington Avenue were put under a 99-year lease by the Columbia Theater company for use as a theater. As part of the process of converting the building into a theater, the Windsor Hotel was torn down and rebuilt. It is assumed that it was at this time that the additional stories were added to 107 Washington Avenue, although there is no exact record of the addition. The rebuild was rapid, as the hotel was torn down in February 1909 and the theater opened in November 1909. According to the *Minneapolis Tribune*, during the late summer of 1909 three eight-hour shifts were being used. Work on the theatre was being done twenty-four hours a day to complete the theater as rapidly as possible.

In November of 1909, the theater – known as the Gayety Theater – was opened to the public. Opening night at the theater was a burlesque show with many city dignitaries in attendance, including the mayor.



Minnesota Historical Society



Once the theater opened, the adjacent 107 Washington Avenue became known as the Gayety Annex. Evidence of this name today remains in front of the entrance to Runyon's, where the name Gayety Annex still can be seen on the sidewalk. During this time, the Gayety Annex served as both a café and a hotel that performers would frequent.

Although the Gayety opened as a reputable theater in 1909, throughout the 1910s and 1920s, it began to transition to lewd and risqué vaudeville and burlesque acts. In 1927, after hearing of complaints, several Minneapolis aldermen went to a performance. *The Minneapolis Star* reported on October 15, 1927, that the aldermen were not impressed, calling it “raw, rotten, obscene, indecent, and lewd” and one even stated that his son would never be allowed back home if he attended a show there. The theater was forced by the city to close for two years after this, until the theater agreed to tame down the performances.

After reopening, the Gayety continued operating as a theater until 1941. It then briefly operated as a movie theater until 1945, when it was closed permanently. Despite several intermittent uses and attempts to revive the theater, nothing developed, and the theater was torn down in 1980 leaving a parking lot next to 107 Washington Avenue.

107 Washington Avenue North continued operating as a saloon called the Gayety Annex until the 1960s. During this time the neighborhood around the Annex fell into disrepair as buildings were abandoned. In 1983, Runyon's opened in the building. Known for its buffalo wings, the bar has remained a staple in the neighborhood and is one of the longest running businesses in the area.

